Xero Comics 8

NUMBER EIGHT IN THE SERIES 'ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME'

by Richard Kyle

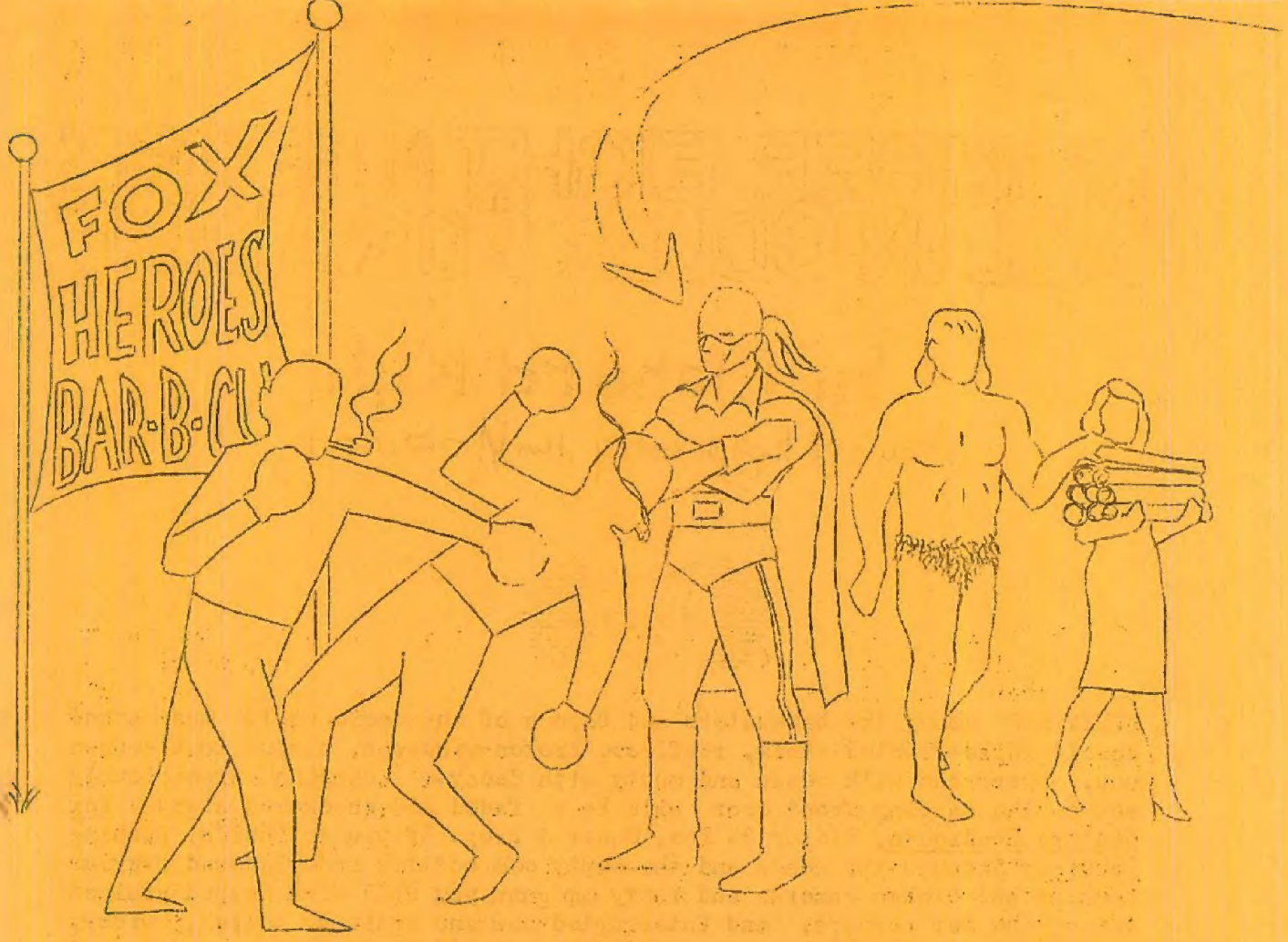
drawings highjacked by Jim MORIARTY

SOMEWHERE among the backwaters and bayous of the comic world must stand an old false-fronted shack, roofless, broken-windowed, almost tumble-down now, overgrown with weeds and musty with decay. Hanging precariously above the sagging front door will be a faded and checkered sign: Fox Feature Syndicate, Victor S. Fox, Owner & Prop. If you go inside, pushing your way through the weeds and the empty cola bottles and mildewed premium coupons and broken cameras and rusty cap guns, you will find heaped against one of the far corners, and interrupted now and again by taller, wider, Esquire-sized magazines, a ragged stack of old comic books --- none of them well preserved, not even the newest issues. In fact, if you thumb through them, you'll notice a peculiarity of the climate here. Only the older magazines are in passable condition; the newer ones are the ones that smell of decay.

By now, you'll probably have seen enough to satisfy you. You'll edge your way back to the door and --- watching the sign doesn't drop on you --- you'll shake your cuffs out and then you'll go on your way.

You shouldn't. You should stay a while. Something important happened here ...

... the education of Victor Fox



Who's who at the bar-b-cue: With Green Mask looking on, "News" Blake (with pipe) and "News" Doakes (with cigarette) decide who'll be the Mask's aide. Pipesmoking Blake clearly has the inside track. In the background, Samson and Joan Mason, Blue Beetle's girl friend, return from a firewood hunting expedition. While Blue Beetle jealously awaits Joan, Domino (clutching a bottle of pop from a case he's just filched at a deserted soft drink stand nearby), the Green Mask's boy assistant, miffed because the Beetle has been upstaging them in Mystery Men Comics, tries to conk him on the head with his boomerang. As usual, it goes astray, and Green Mask is going to get it in

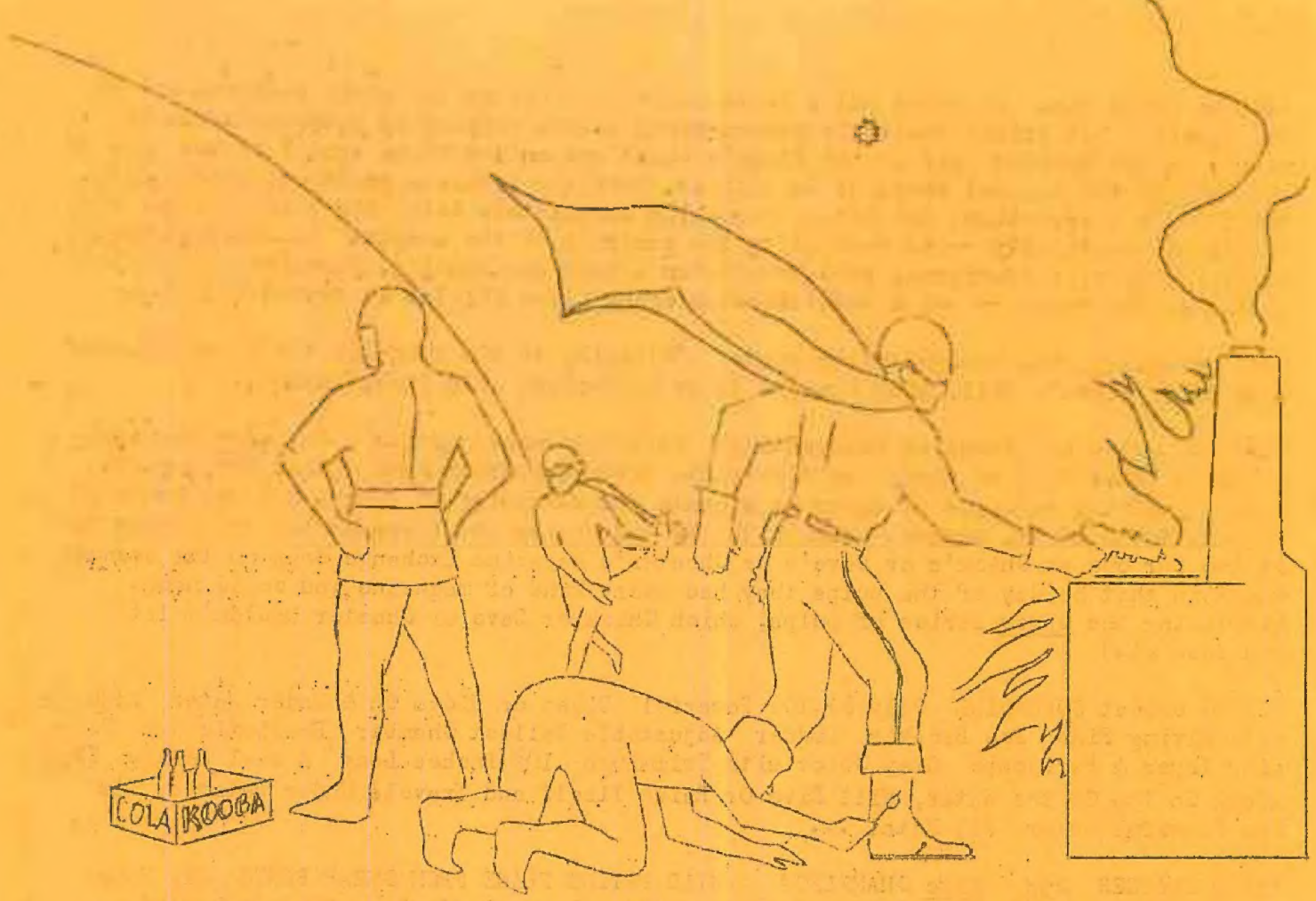
* * *

I

In April 1939, just a few days short of one full year after Superman had picked up his first automobile, Fox Publications, Inc. issued Wonder Comics, the pilot model of the Fox chain, shortly to become Wonderworld. By the end of 1941 Victor Fox was publishing a string of nine comic books, had placed one of his heroes on radio coast to coast, was competing monthly with Esquire in a men's magazine featuring such writers as Jerome Weidman, Chester B. Himes, and Irving Wallace, and was energetically promoting a "new thrill" soft drink containing vitamin B_1.

Offhand, you'd say Victor S. Fox was a success.

Wonderworld certainly was, anyhow. At a time when most comic book art was cartoonish Wonderworld's feature, the Flame, was rendered with a skill and style that has seldom been surpassed --- maybe it never has. And mixed in with the usual hack work of the period were such strips as "Yarko, the Great --- Master of Magic," "Spark Stevens -- of the Navy," and "Dr. Fung -- Master Sleuth of the Orient," all substantial secondary features.



the neck again. At the barbecue, the Flame, his Flame Gun set on full automatic, is attempting with little success to get the charcoal burning. Meantime, Rex Dexter of Mars, tempted beyond human endurance, prepares to give the Flame a hotfoot. That bright star shining above the Flame heralds Stardust the Super Wizard, who is travelling as usual on highly accelerated light waves. Stardust is in a quandry. He has perceived Dexter's dastardly intent but he left his Hotfoot Extinguishing Ray at home, and his all-purpose Fire Extinguishing Ray would put out the barbecue, as well. Decisions. What's for barbecue? Fox, of course ...

* * *

None of them were great characters, and only the Flame was a memorable one --- but the other day, when I came upon them after an absence of more than twenty years, I recalled each one with a fidelity that nostalgia alone cannot evoke. A world that is gone came back to me.

It was the eleventh issue, March 1940 ... The cover, of course, was by the illustrator of "The Flame." His name was given as Basil Berold, and because it is a curious name, it may have been his real one. (Most of the pseudonymously drawn Fox strips were signed by good old American-sounding names, no matter what the artists really called themselves. Floyd Kelly, Charles Nicholas, and Arthur Dean were, at one time or another, actually George Tuska, Larry Antonette, and S. R. Powell.) As usual, the cover was marvelously complex and beautifully rendered.

In the upper-left, the Flame, clad in his skin-tight yellow uniform and the distinctive red mask that fitted snugly over his eyes and head, his red, calf-length boots striding in the air, his red cape billowing behind him, dangles by one gauntleted hand from a chain thrown over the side of his speeding airplane as it roars through the logotype. In his free right hand, drawn from its red, cylindrical holster, is the

massive Flame Gun. It spews out a great comber of fire at two enemy soldiers and at the fanciful but grimly realistic cannon-sized weapon rearing up between them, its stubby muzzle trained full on the Flame's chest and on the flame symbol there. One of the men, in the cap and brass of an officer, futilely levels a ponderous hand gun on the Flame's mid-section; the other, crouching desperately below the searing fire, attempts -- frantically -- to manipulate the controls of the weapon. In the background, other soldiers, infantrymen, race toward him across the smoking, barbwired battlefield, rifles at the ready -- and a metallic-blue enemy plane circles in toward the kill.

And, naturally, the cover caption reads: "Clinging to the wing-tip the Flame unleases a blast of fire." Well, they managed to be half-right this time, anyhow ...

The back cover is almost as interesting. It's the Johnson Smith & Co. advertisement. A lot of times that ad meant the difference between putting down a dime for a comic book or waiting a couple of weeks or a month and borrowing it from a friend, or -- if he hadn't bought it, either, because the ad was old or not there at all -- trading for it two for one at Chick's or Dave's or Chester's Magazine Exchange down on the avenue, where in that heyday of the pulps they had every kind of magazine you could name. (Including the Spicy series of pulps, which Chick or Dave or Chester wouldn't let you look at.)

DIVING u-boat SUBMARINE Only $1.19 Powerful Dives or Rides On & Under Water Adjustable Diving Fins Ice Breaker Rudder Adjustable Ballast Chamber Realistic Gun Conning Tower & Periscope Grey Color with Trimmings 10½ Inches Long A real beauty Zips Along On Top Of the Water, Will Dive Or Raise Itself and Travels Under Water By Its Own Powerful Motor All Metal ...

FIELD GLASSES 25¢ Live CHAMELEON BUILD FLYING PLANE FROM CHEAP PARTS Fly Your Own Plane! Book of plans telling how to build a low priced plane from junk yard parts. 10 lesson Flying Course Ground School. Price 25¢.

Johnson Smith & Co. would sell you anything your childish mind could conceive of. And in the very small print some things it couldn't. DANCE HALL TO WHITE SLAVERY Thousands of white girls are trapped into white slavery every year. Explains in vivid detail true stories of devilish schemes to lure innocent young girls. Price 25¢ LIVES OF HOTCHA CHORUS GIRLS 10¢ Yes, the Johnson Smith & Co. advertisement was always in the back of your head when you plunked down your dime. A new ad must have been looked forward to eagerly by every publisher in the business ...

The inside front cover listed the winners of a recent contest -- the early Fox comics had contests at the drop of a beany -- and Norma Richerson, Box 86, Hardesty, Oklahoma was the first prize winner. Across from this announcement was the first page of "The Flame"...

*****

The Flame's splash panel, embellished with a medium-sized "The" in script and a huge "Flame" in a vaguely Eastern style of lettering, a noncommital "by" and an Old English "Basil Berold" -- as well as a minor forest fire of flames and a bust drawing of the Flame himself -- contains the legend:

> "Greedy for power and territory, King Rodend, ruler of the tiny Balkan country of Kalnar, sends his forces against the peaceful kingdom of Dorna, an act that threatens to throw the entire world into war ..."

And then the story begins. It is not the usual Flame story of giant metal man-carrying spiders attacking New York and climbing through the city as though it were a collection of twigs, or of an invasion of super-tanks capable of boring their way through any obstruction; this one tells of his origin as well -- and even the eight-panel page of the time (today's six panel page was not yet standard) allows little elbow room for the usual dramatic complications. I'm going to tell it to you, however, for it could serve as a virtual template for the early Fox comics. And what fascinated us, in another time, should always interest us, now.

At intelligence headquarters in the capital of Dorna two uniformed figures pace the floor: an elderly, white-burnsided man, tall and erect; a young and beautiful blonde girl. Wearily, the man turns to his companion. "I'm afraid, Maria, that our forces haven't a chance."

"Why? Because of Rodend's fire cannons?"

"Exactly! Nothing can stop them! Asbestos burns like thunder before them."

"I know just the one to stop them." Maria clenches her fists. "The Flame!"

"The Flame? What do you mean?"

"Listen," Maria says, "I'll tell you his story..."

Twenty-five years ago in the Chinese city of Ichang, close by the Yangtse River, a son was born to the Reverend Arnold Charteris and his wife. In season, the river became a flood, and Charteris, knowing the end was near, placed his son in a basket, put a small locket around his neck, and set his makeshift cradle upon the water.

After hours of tossing and bobbing on the swirling current, the tiny basket, swept swiftly along through the raging storm, suddenly disappeared into a small cavern opening. Into the murky depths it sped, finally coming to a country overrun with exotic flowers and plants growing in wild confusion. "I hear a baby's cry! It comes from that basket in the river! By Tao! It's a baby! Sent by the gods to succeed our recently deceased Grand Lama!" Picking up the foundling, the Buddhist priest hurried to his lamasery. "Look, Brethren! Heaven has given us a new leader!"

The child grew into manhood. For hours, he jousted and wrestled with the other youths, strengthening his naturally powerful body; and in feats of magic, too, his prowess far excelled that of his teachers.

One day, a band of explorers, one of them Maria, stumbled upon the Utopian valley. "May I see that locket you are wearing?" a visitor asked the High Lama. "W-why, it contains a picture of the Reverend Charteris! Remember him, James? He was drowned in the flood -- say, this must be his son!"

Two hours later, after they had spoken to the priest who found the child, young Charteris was called to the old man's study. "Your place is in the outer world, my son! You must go! Tonight I will reveal to you my most potent secret of magic -- tonight, you will be given the power over flame!"

That night a great procession filed its way from the palace, led by the son of the Reverend Charteris, still clad in the blue robes of the High Lama. Behind him, at the head of the train of monks, the old priest walked, bearing a golden ceremonial cushion. Striding between two jade pillars, from whose crests burned twin white flames, they ascended to a broad marble dais lying at the feet of a massive, towering green Buddha. The priest kneeled upon the golden cushion and gestured, and as layers of smoke began to form in the air about them, young Charteris removed his robe of office and stood waiting for his trial and investiture.

The old man raised his arms. Charteris -- clothed in white fire, entwined in the layers of curling smoke -- soared upward above the face of the huge idol. Transfigured, he grew larger and larger, until he drawfed the priest below him. Green rays of energy burst from the staring Buddha, and for a time, Charteris became one with the flame.

Then it was over. Power greater than any other man's was his. He was the master of flame... The next day the old man and his pupil exchanged farewells. "My son, you leave us armed with potent mystic powers -- use them for good!"

"It will be so!"

Maria concludes her story. "So you see, the Flame is the one man who can help us! He will do as I ask...."

Suddenly the door is thrown open and a tall, muscular man strides into the room. "Flame!" Maria cries.

"I came as soon as I received your message."

Told of the power of Rodend's fire cannon and Dorna's inability to stand before them, the Flame agrees to help. Running out to his plane, he leaves for the front immediately.

Small fire guns are brought up as he dives over the trenches, and the enemy attempts to burn him from the sky. The Flame passes through unharmed. Fastening a chain to the fuselage, he climbs out on the wing of his hurtling plane. "Here's where you get a dose of your own medicine!" he cries, and grasping the chain, he goes over the side.

The Flame hedgehops across the battlefield, swinging from the end of the chain, and Rodend's soldiers begin to panic. The great Fire Cannon is brought into action: "Nothing can resist that!" The Flame dives toward it, and as the monstrous weapon roars, his own handgun looses a bolt of fire at its muzzle. And: "unable to find an outlet, the searing flames expand, and the gun is blown to bits."

Landing in the midst of the smoking remains, the Flame's fists lash out. Rodend's soldiers, dazed and frightened, cry for mercy, raising their arms in surrender. Soon the soldiers of Dorna take charge of his captives, and he wings his way toward the headquarters of the cruel King Rodend...

In his chambers, Rodend, a Hitlerian figure with a small mustache and a wild tangle of hair falling across his forehead, broods over his war maps. An aged servant enters.

"You rang, sire?"

"Poke up that fire -- it's getting chilly in here."

As the old man stirs up the burning logs, the Flame, arms crossed over his chest, materializes from out of the crackling blaze. Rodend and his man-servant fall back in fright.

"What do you want?" screams Rodend, drawing his heavy automatic pistol.

"I have come to give you your due!" The Flame tears Rodend's pistol from him as though he were an awkward child, and like a pneumatic hammer, his gauntleted fist pounds at King Rodend's face.

"Spare me! I beg of you. I will do anything you say, anything!"

"All right, here's what I want you to do...."

Early the next morning at intelligence headquarters in Dorna... "Maria! Maria! King Rodend has ceased fighting and...."

"I know -- here's a note from the Flame: 'Glad to have helped. Don't hesitate to call on me when you need help to overcome evil....'"

And the story is over.

In those nine Osterized pages, blending together chunks and pieces of Shangri-la, the story of Moses, the theory of reincarnation, technologically isolated super-scientific weapons, mythical European kingdoms, magic, and mysticism, are a whole dead world. The world before World War II. Today, the story seems uninspired and centuries away; then, it evoked an array of aging but powerful and contemporary symbols, our final compromise with the 19th Century and its simultaneous belief in science and magic, democracy and autocracy, romanticism and realism.-- and in the symbol of the Flame it evoked, too, less gracefully, less felicitously than Jerry Siegel's conception of Superman and his origin, the new and idealistic symbol of the 20th Century.

It is easy to laugh at the superficial, paper-doll images of the men who ran around in public in their long underwear yelling. "Up, up, and away!" and "Shazam!" and other inanities at the top or their lungs or sniffing hard water formulas or driving Batmobiles around as though they were Model A Fords or living "in the caverns beneath the New York

World's Fair" -- or hedgehopping battlefields dangling from the bellies of airplanes while trying to pot the soldiery with revolver-sized Flame Guns.

But it is not so easy to laugh at the hearts of these paper dolls. Most, like Raggedy Ann's, had "I Love You" written on them.

It may be that the popular literature of the '30s and early '40s is unique in history, for from the pulp magazines' the Shadow and Doc Savage, through to Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel and the Flame, the heroes fought for idealistic beliefs of justice and right, and not for personal profit. Not even the folk heroes of the past can make that claim -- the taint of personal interest clings to almost all of them. And it is the simplified world of the comic strip where symbols can artistically replace representative realism more easily and convincingly than any other story-telling medium, in which the Idealist reached his flower. Idealists are sometimes funny. Idealism never is. The measure of those brightly costumed refugees from the Charles Atlas ads is not their preposterous appearance, but their symbol as men with the power to satisfy any desire, satisfying their desires by doing good. It was naive of them, perhaps; I don't think it was childish.

The costume heroes brought another unique thing to the kids sitting out on the back stoop at home -- or in the pool of shade behind the school cafeteria at lunch time -- while they read comic books and talked comic books: Liberation. Mythologies and fairy tales have always placed a penalty on the possession of supernormal powers by men. Icarus fell. Cinderella tripped. But Superman never fell -- and if he did, what difference would it make? Billy Batson might trip, sure, but a quick "Shazam" would get him out of trouble. For the first time in mass literature, physical liberation from the confines of the ordinary brought reward to the hero, rather than disaster.

Coulton Waugh, in his history of the comic strip, takes up the masked costume hero and wonders: Why in the United States of America should "justice be hooded"? Like many others before and since, Coulton Waugh missed the point.

Charlie Chaplin, in his most successful pictures, played a noble and honorable man who was a victim of circumstance. A king disguised by nature and a cruel society as a tramp, his low station in life and his inadequate body hid his real worth. The great pathos of those pictures was achieved by suddenly revealing that the wretched and laughable little figure on the screen was a man, just like you and me, who was doing the best he could in the shape and circumstances life had imposed upon him. City Lights, perhaps Chaplin's finest motion picture, tells of his love for a blind girl, and of his efforts to obtain money for an operation on her eyes -- even though he knows that when she sees him she may reject him. For the blind girl only knows him for what he really is, for his kindness, his goodness, his innate nobility. She does not see the false picture of him the world sees and laughs at as he struggles through one ordeal after another to obtain the money her eyes need.

Trash, too, can use the materials of art. It is no accident that the Shadow was Lamont Cranston, rather than Lamont Cranston the Shadow. Nor is it an accident that Clark Kent was really Superman in disguise. They were the prototypes of their kind and the most nearly perfect in conception, and their message was not that this ordinary man concealed an extraordinary man, but that this extraordinary man concealed an ordinary man -- that the world did not commonly see the real person behind Clark Kent's glasses or Cranston's urbane but not unusual appearance. The costume and the masks revealed the real individual by hiding the superficialities of his day-to-day aspect, just as the girl's blindness revealed the true character of the little tramp.

The costume heroes said that men could be vastly more than they were, and that they were vastly more than they seemed to be. And there, in those swarming little rectangles, they demonstrated it.

"The Flame" was not a great strip -- it was Berold's marvelous gift for anatomy and garish realism that sustained it -- and in its attribution of mystic as well as scientific powers to the Flame, the symbolism was weakened; nonetheless, when you were not quite ten and the spirit of things counted far more than their styles or -- even -- their content, it was something you looked forward to.

It is far easier to criticise art than trash. Art appeals to the emotions and the intellect; trash appeals to one or the other, but never to both. Yet the perennial success of the over-intellectualized trash that passes for "literary" fiction and the enduring popularity of the over-emotionalized trash of writers like Gene Stratton-Porter, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jack Woodford, Zane Grey, and Mickey Spillane (and Chester Gould and Jerry Siegal) demand understanding; for sometimes the spirit of first-rank trash is more important than the content of second-rank art. And since with trash it is the spirit of the thing that counts -- in the end, the only thing that counts -- the customary standards of art criticism can never apply.

If we want to see "The Flame" and the others for what they really were, we must understand, as we understood then, what they tried to be, not what they actually achieved, nor what we believe art might have made of them....

*****

Magicians were very big in those days too. There was Ibis, the Invincible, in Whiz Comics, and Zatara, in Action -- and Yarko, the Great, who came right after "The Flame" in Wonderworld.

Yarko had a time of it. He was usually pretty well drawn himself, but he often had to associate with as ill-drawn a crew of rascals as you could find anywhere. Even the police were out of proportion in the March issue, and I imagine it really offended Yarko, a fastidious dresser and a man who clearly believed a gentleman's right arm should be as long as his left (but no longer). Apparently, Yarko himself was drawn by one artist -- a man with a speaking acquaintance with anatomy -- and the rest of the strip was filled in by whoever was handily. I'd guess it was a big month for Yarko when his own artist would illustrate the rest of the strip, too.

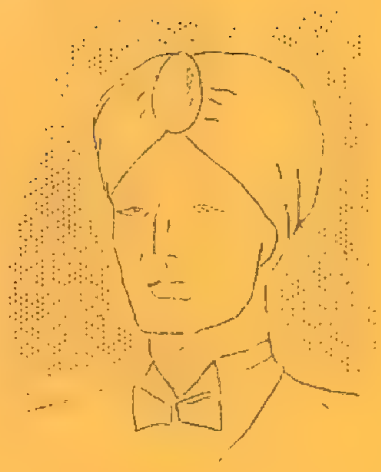
Despite his name, Yarko was an American-looking fellow, tall, with agreeable but otherwise undistinguished features. He completely lacked the department store dummy appearance of Mandrake or the reputed ugliness of Warlock, the Wizard, in Nickel Comics. As I said, Yarko was a fastidious dresser. He wore a white tie and tails, a red cape, and an ochre turban with a blood-red gem in the center of it. When he went to bed he took off the cape. He was a rather fastidious talker, too. In this episode, "Captain Debit of the Homicide Bureau" calls on Yarko, and Yarko says, "Hello. To what may I credit your unexpected visit?"

Well, Yarko may have been a magician, all right, but he was no seer.

It seems an East Indian Seventh Son of a Seventh Son is attempting to find two jewels -- the twin jewels of blood -- whose possession will give him reign over all India. One of the stones is traced to a gang of American thieves. After three or four of them are found dead, Captain Debit decides it's time to request Yarko's help because, "I am the laughing stock of the town." Yarko takes a look at the bodies and goes home to bed. After he has taken off his cape and gotten under the covers, white tie, tails, turban and all, and turned out the lights, two East Indians attack him. It appears the other Twin Jewel of Blood -- the Ada-La-Hoda -- is in his turban. Yarko kicks them out of bed, knocking one head first into a large vase conveniently located at the foot. Then, true magic, he turns the other one upside down and makes him spin like a top until the police arrive.

A few months later the Seventh Son of the Seventh Son gathers his people together once again. He is no quitter: "The famed Yarko has sent us the Ada-La-Hida, but he still possesses its sister. We must get it!"

Yarko, who had returned the Ada-La-Hida because the sight of it killed any but the rightful owner, suddenly appears in a vision. "Ture!" he intones, "You are the Seventh Son of the Seventh Son of the Order of Aribah, but you have erred in your ways, and do your sire hath given you only the Ada-La-Hida! He entrusted me with the other which I wear on my turban. Were you to be given the Ada-La-Hoda, you would become very powerful... Power turns the heads of men. There would be eternal tumult in India. Make no further attempts to gain it!"



The Seventh Son of the Seventh Son of the Order of Aribah looks properly convinced. Maybe because the vision of Yarko is as big as a house.

Actually, this is a rather tame Yarko adventure. He once took on an army of men conceived up out of mandrake roots, and wrestled to the death with the astral body of a black magician while they were both hundreds of feet tall. Unlike the other comic book magicians, Yarko dealt largely in the metaphysical and the mystic, rather than in "simple" magic, and if the content was not often distinguished, the spirit was....

After Yarko came "Shorty Shortcake. "Shorty" was signed by "Jerry Williams" who was actually Klaus Nordling, the artist for "Spark Stevens" later on in the book. Although Shorty was drawn in the animated cartoon style of the time -- a huge head, with coat-button eyes and shiny Rudolf Valentino haircut, a tiny body, and arms and legs like lengths of garden hose -- there is a liveliness that comes from an understanding of the comic book medium. (If Basil Berold had a major fault, it was that he was primarily an illustrator, rather than a comic strip artist.)

Although you'd never guess it, Shorty is in Guatemala this month on [illegible] Professor Gnu, who is a very sore, if not actually mad, scientist. Gnu has invented an "H_2O Magnet" which draws "all of the waters of the countryside" to his door. Shorty, who doesn't want to pay a dollar a glass for a drink, heists the magnet, nearly drowns in the flood that follows, is captured by Gnu's oversized carrier pigeon ("Carrier Pigeon 40 x Normal Size Product of Professor Gnu" the sign on the birdcage reads), is almost eaten by a thirty foot earthworm, saves himself by gulping a little of the professor's Enlarger Fluid, busts out of Gnu's laboratory, grows a mile high, is struck by lightning, and rained on until he shrinks (that's what Professor Gnu needed all that water for), and finally soars off in a glider presented in appreciation for his accomplishments ("Gee thanks," says Shorty)....

"Patty O'Day -- Newsreel Reporter" follows. It was a nothing strip: "Death to ze American!" "Come on, I'll lick the bunch of you!" "He's unconscious!" "Good! Too bad he has fallen down this well! Ha-ha!" "You murdering beasts!" "We only follow orders!".... 9

Then, on page 32, where the modern comic book peters out with an ad for a blackhead extractor or a genuine cardboard "Frontier Cabin" "big enough for 2-3 kids" ($1.00 a cabin, 5 for $4.00), Wonderworld presented "Dr. Fung -- Master Sleuth of the Orient." The credit says "Arthur Dean"; actually it was drawn by S.R. Powell, an old timer who took over the "Shadow" comic strip from Vernon V. Greene and who is still active today.

Dr. Fung was a small, bald man, with a white mustache and goatee, and glasses that fell down over his nose. He was aided by Dan Barrister, a blond American considerably taller than Dr. Fung, who wore calf-length boots, blue riding breeches and jacket, a white shirt and a black necktie. In this episode, Dan had quite a time with that necktie. Right after a tough fight he had to strip it off and open his collar at the throat -- to show he'd really exercised (kind of like old time vaudeville dancers who used to throw off their coats and roll up their sleeves to indicate they really meant business) -- and then get it tied again and that tough collar button fastened again before the next panel.

"Invited by his old friend, Alzea Rapkut, to inspect a mysterious pit," the flash panel reads, "Dr. Fung takes Dan Barrister to his house in ancient Persia...."

Well, you'd know it. The hole's been there for years, but the minute they look over the side, "By Allah's beard!" (as Alzea Rapkut puts it) the earth heaves and cracks open, throwing Dr. Fung and Dan Barrister headlong into the pit. They fall for hours. Then: "Dan! We're slowing up! We're beginning to float down! Someone is behind this!" Finally they fall into an enormous glass jar and are seized by green, apelike creatures with suckers for fingers and built-in unicycles for legs who bottle them up in glass cylinders and ship them through an overgrown department store pneumatic tube.

At the end of the trip, standing before her throne, is a good-looking blonde girl in red shorts and halter. "Earth people!! At last my prayers are answered!! Please take me back to the land where I was born. I'm sick of being queen of these horrible creatures!" Her name is Rima, and she fell into a seemingly bottomless ravine years before while exploring the Himalayas with her father.

"Can't you speak louder, girl?" Dr. Fung asks, "I can hardly hear you!"

She doesn't dare to, though, because -- although she can whisper in double exclamation points -- the green things are very sensitive to noise.

Suddenly: "Dan, look!" cries Dr. Fung, as the girl throws her arms about him for protection. A green creature twenty feet high rolls into the room on his organic unicycle. "It is 'He'!" screams the girl, "'He' is angry! 'He' will kill you!!"

"Dan!" yells Dr. Fung, "Shout! Quick man! Scream your loudest!"

Dan screams, "He" claps his hands over his ears, and they race for the "suction elevator" that brought them -- Rima is going to reverse the "gravitation machinery" controlling it. At the last second "He" dives into the shaft, too, and is carried to the surface, unable to gain on them because "the pressure is even." (That scream of Dan's must really have shaken him up, otherwise "He" would have reversed the "gravitation machinery" himself.) As Dr. Fung leaps from the mouth of the pit he calls to his waiting friend Rapkut (a patient man, evidently) for a gun, and kills the monster as it emerges.

"Back to my own people at last!" says Rima, and then she clears up any doubts about her age, "I was only six years old when I fell down there fifteen years ago! How can I ever thank you?"

"Your happiness is enough!" says Dr. Fung, who, despite his vigor, is apparently too old for the game. Barrister, however, is up on his addition, and knows what a girl's talkin' about when she tells him she's over eighteen. His hand reaches for her waist.

A psychiatrist's might reach for his notebook.

"Ted Maxon, The Phantom Rider," by Cecelia Munson is next. The source of Miss Munson's inspiration is revealed in the closing panels: "Who are you, mister?" "Who am I? I am the Phantom Rider, the friend of those in trouble! But my real name must always remain a secret." The Phantom Rider adjusts his mask, and "with a 'Hoof it, Streak!' he is gone -- to reappear when needed..."

Tex was shortchanged all around. He didn't even have a kemo sabe...

In those days almost every comic book ran a two-page humor strip. In Wonderworld it was "Don Quixote in Modern Times" and it was about Don Quixote in modern times...

Klaus Nordling, like most of the early comic book artists, was no wonder with a pen; unlike most of them, with his cartoonist's feel for exaggerated action and foreshortening, he made up for his lack of finish. His strips moved. Although he was never in -- say -- Jack Cole's league here, his comic book sense was superior to any other Fox artist, except, possibly, Dick Briefer.

For Wonderworld (aside from "Shorty Shortcake," which was done in his usual style), he drew "Spark Stevens -- of the Navy," an adventure strip paralleling the service movies Hollywood had been making for years: two women-chasing, action-hungry, free-wheeling, light-hearted buddies who were always beating up on spies -- when they weren't beating up on eachother over a girl. Nordling did the job well. And reading them today is much more pleasant than looking at Pat O'Brian and James Cagney on TV. Spark and Chuck seem like nicer guys.

They were big guys, too. None of this Cagney fancy-dan stuff with the fists. Spark and Chuck were willing to take one to give one, and you couldn't beat them, not if there were a dozen of you, in anything like a fair fist-fight. When they were taken out, they were taken out with a gun or a knock on the back of the head -- or some other unfair, unAmerican, method. Chuck was bigger and blonder and had a heavier jaw. The jaw was a giveaway, of course: Chuck was stupider as well. Spark (although he had a hell of a punch, naturally) carried a normal sized jaw, so that meant he was the smart one of the two. Smart enough to get the strip named after him, anyhow.

This month they're "in the native quarter" of Guam, complaining bitterly about the scarcity of women. (Spark and Chuck spent all their time in the tropics, I guess, for they always wore whites. And no matter what happened, they kept them clean. Some guys have a knack.) Suddenly, a white girl calls "Hsst! Say --" from a second story window. A rough hand immediately claps over the girl's mouth and she is snatched from sight. Spark and Chuck run upstairs, and one, two, three, four, knock out the red-suited, totally bald villain (no hero ever knocked out a villain with a fringe over his ears) and his three gorillas. The girl is "the Colonel's Daughter"; and when she discovered the spies stealing military maps from government files, they "spirited" her to their hideout.

While she has been talking and Spark and Chuck have been listening with both eyes, the inconspicuous man in the red suit has crept to the wall behind them. He presses a lever and a Murphy bed falls out, knocking Chuck and Spark unconscious. ||

When the thugs finally wake up, they wonder: "Wot'll we do wit' 'em?" But Red Suit has a solution: "Spider Cavern. Vit the dawn come also the spider! Ha! Our two sailors vill never see the sun again!"

Well, just as the night is lifting, gobs manage to free themselves "by rubbing their bonds against the jagged rocks." And just in time, too, for here come the spiders, and you've never seen anything like them. They skipped dinner the night before -- and maybe the midday snack, too -- and they are hungry. Spark and Chuck climb the walls of the cave frantically, but the spiders hurry after them in a mass so thick it looks like an overwrought shag rug.

"Holy ---! They're gaining on us!!" says Chuck.

"Gotta match?" asks Spark, cooly brandishing the blackened end of one of the clubs they have been fighting the spiders off with. "Lucky these guys left these oil-soaked torch behind..." Spark explains, and they hurl the burning torches into the writhing, hungry carpet crawling toward them. The spiders, who must have been on a heavy diet of high-test gasoline, ignite with a gusto that would have delighted C. B. DeMille, and Spark and Chuck, coughing and wheezing, follow the smoke (Chuck, the wit, calls it "Eau-de-garbage") as it drifts to the entrance.

There, they take cover behind a couple of boulders, and when Baldy and his pals show up to see how breakfast went at Spider Cavern, one, two, three, they capture the spies and herd them into the mouth of the cave. Spark hurries off to get help, and Chuck, intent on keeping the spies holed up in the cavern, does not see the menacing figure creeping up behind him. That's when Spark proves the strip was named after the right hero.

"I wondered where the fourth guy was!" he exclaims, whopping a rock on the spy's head just as he was about to plug Chuck. (It proves, too, that Spark could count, and that was more of a rarity in the comic world than you might imagine -- as was shown recently in "The Several Soldiers of Victory.")

The sailors rush back to the village to save the Colonel's Daughter. But she has already been saved: "Lucky we came along and untied ya, or you'd have starved to death in there," two soldiers are telling the girl as she gazes up at them in rapt admiration. Hearts burst out of her balloon as she exclaims, "My heroes!"

And Spark and Chuck -- as their movie counterparts always did -- lose the girl again. (In one episode, they saved <u>two</u> girls and double dated. They were dollar-and it looked like the boys were home free at last, but then the girls got to gossiping and exchanging fashion news and recipes.) But next month they'll try once more...

The last story in the book was "K-51 -- Spies at War," a middling strip drawn by Powell under the name of "Barron Bates." It was all scrunched up in ten and eleven and even twelve panel pages. You virtually needed to be Tiny Tim to read it.

Page 64 closed the magazine on a note that would thrill any young sucker's heart:

A b s o l u t e l y F r e e ! !
<u>T H E C O M I C S C O P E</u>
reg u. s. patent office
<u>Not a toy but a real projector</u>
A New Amazing Invention Show your own films at home --- charge admission --- run real new movie parties. Now you can screen comic strips in your own home and make them in any size and in full color and give a real movie show. Nothing to buy. Everything free.

Well, almost free. You actually sent in three coupons (one from each of the Fox magazines of the time) and fifteen cents "to cover the cost of mailing."

A friend of mine tore the coupons out of magazines in a second hand store, sold a grocer back some pop bottles he'd just pilfered from the storeroom, and sent away for the new amazing invention. He got his money's worth.

The "Comicscope" was a flat chunk of cardboard, brightly and crudely printed with pictures of the current Fox heroes, which could be folded into a small box; and a glass lens as lumpy as the bottom of a pop bottle, and a fourth the size, inserted into a short, black cardboard tube. When the box was assembled there was a hole in the front for the lens and one in the bottom for a lightbulb, and a slit in the side to push the sample Comicscope strips through. It worked -- once you'd sealed up all the gaps in the seams of the box with masking tape and squeezed into the blackest closet you could find -- but it was hardly worth it. The Comicscope strips were abominably drawn and printed, not in full color, but in red and black on a saffron background. You couldn't use regular comic strips, naturally because the printing came out backwards, and besides, who'd want to cut his comic books in little ribbons about two inches wide.

Why Fox peddled the Comicscope is a puzzle. There was obviously no money in it -- the fifteen cents must *really* have gone for handling and mailing costs -- and although new Comicscope strips cost a fair amount, they were so crummy it is hard to believe Fox had any genuine expectation of selling them. The Comicscope must not have boosted sales for his comic books, either, for you almost never saw an old *Wonderworld* with one of the coupons missing. Of course, he may have used the names of those who answered for an advertisers' sucker list, but the chain carried so little outside advertising even this seems unlikely.

The real answer is probably that Fox was a promoter. Promoters will promote things, even when there's no money in them, just to keep their hands in -- rather like Dr. Snaffleblocker, the Hollywood physician in one of Jack Woodford's rare non-sex novels, who was discovered as the story opened performing an abortion on a chipmunk....

And finally, the back inside page carried ads for two new Victor Fox comic books, *Science Comics* and *Weird Comics*. Further along, we'll take a brief look at them.

This was the eleventh issue of *Wonderworld Comics*, March 1940.* A year earlier the competition hadn't been as stiff. But now things had changed. Superman was appearing in a

*After this article was completed and in Dick Lupoff's hands, I discovered a letter by Ron Graham in *Alter-Ego*, a comic book fan magazine published by Jerry Bails of Inkster, Michigan, indicating that *Wonderworld Comics* had an earlier incarnation as *Wonder Comics*, and featured "Wonder Man" rather than "The Flame." Neither my memory nor the great stack of Fox comics Bill Thailing had lent me were of any help. I asked for more information from Mr. Graham, and he referred me to David Wigransky of Washington, D.C. Here is Mr. Wigransky's reply:

"I had the first issue, May 1939, of *Wonder Comics*, which was also the first Fox Publications Inc. comic book. I lent it to Monte F. Bourjaily (head of the comic art studio which illustrated most of the Fox comics of that time: 1939-41) about six years ago, and he never returned it. The numbers and dates were consecutive, so that none were skipped when it became *Wonderworld Comics* and starred 'The Flame' rather than 'Wonder Man.' However, I don't know the exact issue the change took place.

"'Superman' of course began in *Action Comics* #1, June 1938, so I think 'Wonder Man' was the second superhero in comic books (or at least tied with 'Batman' which I think also began in May 1939 in DC's own *Detective Comics*.)

"Bourjaily told me DC Comics filed suit against Fox Publications, claiming 'Wonder Man' infringed upon their character 'Superman.' And even though they were successful, I guess by the time the case was won there were so many and varied superheroes springing up that they decided any more suits of this kind would be ridiculous.

quarterly all his own. So was Batman. Captain Marvel was just getting off the ground. The Human Torch and Submariner (we called him "Submarine-er") were going great guns. Jay Garrick had breathed the hard water formula and become the Fastest Man Alive. And yet, because of Berold and because in 1940 we still responded to fragments of beliefs and feelings and attitudes of the 19th Century that Wonderworld exploited, the book, if it had lost ground, remained far more thrilling and competitive than a present-day comparison with the other -- the mainline -- comics would seem to allow. We took Superman's and Batman's and the others' way of looking at things with us (as they took ours). We didn't take Yarko's or K-51's or Dr. Fung's or even much of the Flame's.

But in its day, it was a good comic book. And it was the best of the Fox chain.

II

Wonderworld was an immediate success, and five months later Fox brought out Mystery Men Comics. It featured Fox's most enduring characters, Green Mask and Blue Beetle, a science fiction strip by Dick (Frankenstein) Briefer called "Rex Dextor of Mars," and Klaus Nordling's "Lt. Drake -- of Naval Intelligence." Other than a two-page "Hemlock Sholmes and Dr. Potson," by "Fred," a remarkable cartoonist who did wonderfully wild corny two-pagers for almost every comic book outfit in the business without ever (as far as I know) signing his name, the rest of the stories are without interest. There is the usual magician and the usual secret agent and the usual western abd the usual Cecelia Munson derivation, this time from Fu Manchu.

"Green Mask" and "Blue Beetle" were pretty usual, too. It is probably the secret of their success.

(Note cont'd from preceding page) "'Wonder Man (or, I think, 'The Wonder Man,' with 'The' in fine print -- I'm only going by memory) was more of a 'Superman' imitation than the others, I guess, as his alter ego was also that of a newspaper reporter. He had blond hair, and an all-red costume (the belt may have been yellow). All I recall about the costume is a short cape, a little less than waist-length. The strip was illustrated by Will Eisner, though I'm sure he signed a pen-name, which may have been the phonetic 'Willis Nerr' (anyway, I do know he used 'Willis Nerr' at some time). 'Wonder Man' had about the same powers as 'Superman' I should say -- although they weren't gone into as thoroughly, so perhaps he didn't have all of them (such as x-ray vision). I hazily remember that Wonder Man had no 'origin'; the series just began with his alter ego going overseas as a war correspondent, and then switching to his super-identity to fight a bunch of Nazi soldiers (they were called something else, of course, as we weren't yet at war with Germany)."

The change from Wonder to Wonderworld took place some time before the sixth issue, apparently, for I've seen a reproduction of this cover in Mystery Men Comics 5. Since it was common practice for distributers to require that three full issues of a new monthly magazine be printed before they would handle it, it's very likely Wonder Comics lasted into the second issue -- and perhaps as long as the fourth.

Although Wonder Comics and "Wonder Man" founded Fox Publications, their influence on Fox magazines and the comic field seems negligible. So Wonderworld Comics and "The Flame," even though they came along a few months later, would still appear to remain the significant Fox Publications comic book and character in the formative months of the company. But an interesting fellow, that "Wonder Man."

RK

And when Fawcett Publications started its line, one of the original entry was Master Comics, featuring, you guessed it, "Master Man". Master Man had a rather mundane origin: pills and exercise and such, but it got him, too, to the same state as the original Superman. He was very strong, could withstand a lot of punishment, run at great speed and for great distances, leap fantastically but not really fly. He was pressured out and replaced by Minute Man, a non-super superpatriot, who in turn gave way to Captain Marvel Junior who ran in Master Comics for a full decade, to the very end.

RL

In the beginning, "Green Mask" was drawn in a style halfway between "Reg'lar Fellers" and early "Red Barry." Green Mask wore dark blue tights with a yellow stripe (down the side), skin-tight pale blue doublet and trunks, a massive, nail-studded leather belt, cavalry boots, a dark blue, crimson lined cape --- and a close-fitting dark green mask that covered his head and eyes and knotted in the back to fall in two trademark streamers. The artist, variously called "Walter Frame" "Michael Barrett" and "Jerry Logan," was obviously no reader of Esquire. (Berold, who did the marvelous covers for Mystery Men, or the color control man, even tried changing the colors of Green Mask's costume in an effort to devise something more compatible with that mask --- but nothing came of it.)

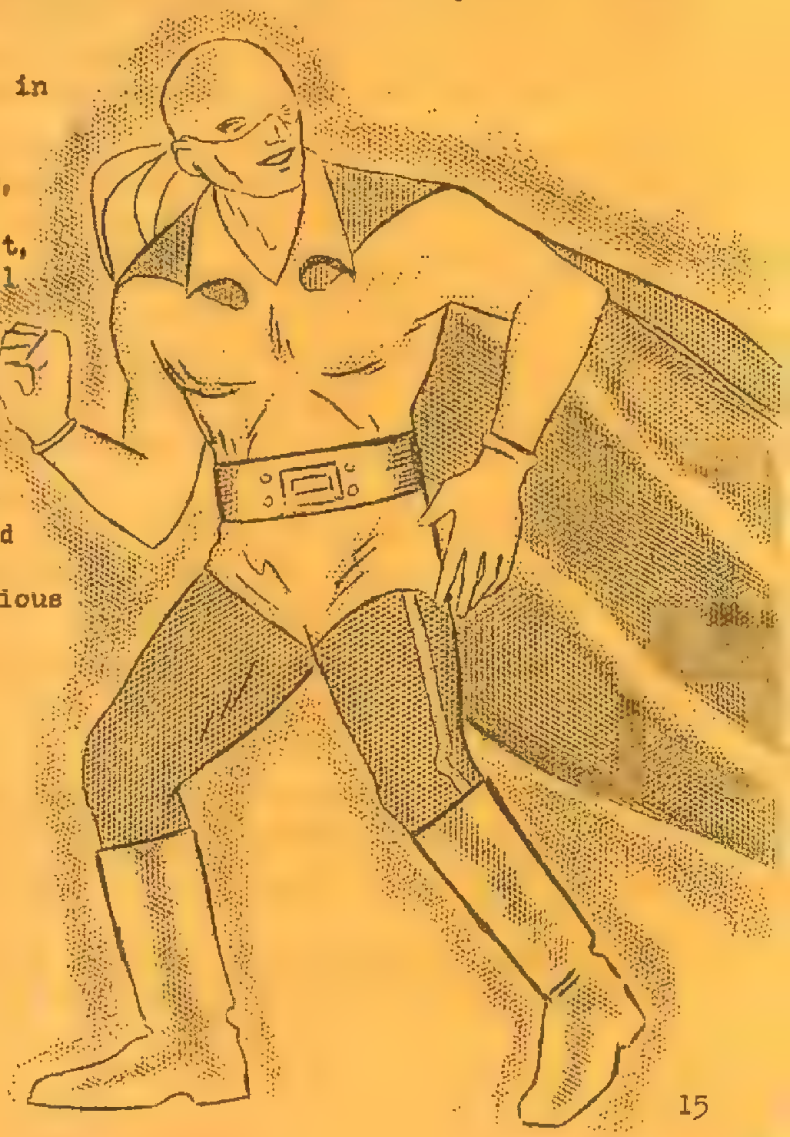
Aided by "the only man who knows the Green Mask's real identity," a reporter named "News" Doakes, he solved a number of uninteresting crimes that bored the police, rather than baffled them, into inaction.

In later issues, under a variety of indifferent artists, he acquired an off-stage identity as Michael Shelby, the son of a murdered senator who had opposed gangsterism; gained super-powers from a "Vita-Ray"; picked up a bumbling boy assistant named Domino, who -- fittingly -- threw boomerangs; took on a new aide named "News" Blake ("News" Doakes was probably too undistinguished a name for a Vita-Rayed superman to associate with); and finally lost most of his super-powers when it became clear his future lay in being a Batman imitator.

In the summer of 1940, Green Mask acquired his own comic book, ultimately outlasting all the Fox heroes, except Blue Beetle, and many of his betters in other magazines as well. It is not only in politics and breakfast cereals that mediocrity has a certain staying power ...

"Blue Beetle" began as a secondary feature in Mystery Men. Within a half-dozen or so issues he opened the book. His own bi-monthly magazine appeared in February 1940, and soon afterward he had a twice-weekly radio program. His durability was so great, he survived Fox Publications itself. We'll come back to him ...

Dick Briefer was no science fiction artist. His spaceships looked like hot water heaters installed by a mad plumber. He was no science fiction writer, either: "Look, Dr. Harvey! Are my eyes deceiving me, or is that a cone shaped planet I see in the glass?" Yet, when he worked on it, as he did in many of the serious "Frankenstein" stories, Briefer had a certain way with horror and pathos that transcended his writing and illustrations.



Right: Michael Shelby as the Green Mask.

The first "Rex Dexter of Mars" strips display his early style at its best, before he began to splash the ink around in big, loose, broad, black strokes -- and some of them display his talent for story, as well.

Rex Dexter of Mars, "Here on Earth -- 2,000 A. D.," helps save the planet from a terrible menace. For this he receives the acclaim of Earth. But two issues later, Dexter brings a huge, fright-maddened Kong-like creature to Earth for exibition. When it runs amok, destroying and maiming, he is forced to kill it, stabbing into its brain through one of the half-human beast's bulging, horrified eyes. Earth forgets its acclaim, it demands his death, and so Rex Dexter's friend the President of Earth is forced to exile him. His fiancee, Cynde (pronounced "Sin-dee" Briefer tells us), reavows her love and joins him as he ventures from planet to planet. Eventually, Earth forgives Rex, and he returns now and again to aid us.

If you could look over the scientific absurdities, "Rex Dexter" was often an entertaining strip. It was a popular one, too, and Rex had his own comic book for a while. He might have had it longer, but Briefer went on one of his periodic humor binges -- and he wasn't near as funny then as he was later with the "Frankie" Frankenstein yarns ...

Klaus Nordling of "Spark Stevens" signed "Lt. Drake -- of the Naval Intelligence" as "F. Klaus." Other than that, it was pure Nordling, a man who handled his blacks and his action a lot better than his anatomy. The stories were good fun, though, and his drawings improved steadily. Lt. Drake, a blond chap with a tickler sized mustache, got around a lot, investigating trans-Atlantic gamblers, opium smugglers, and such -- the kind of activities you'd think would make the Coast Guard jealous. Nordling must have had a thing about spiders, because a couple of months before Spark and Chuck had all that trouble in Wonderworld, Drake got mixed up with them, too. These didn't come wall-to-wall, however. They came in little gelatine capsules that melted in your bedclothes while you slept, releasing an angry black widow ...

Mystery Men Comics had a potential it never realized. Under an adroit publisher, "Green Mask" and "Blue Beetle" and "Rex Dexter" could have become outstanding: the material was there to be used. The success they achieved in their imperfections hints at the greater success they could have had.

It was becoming increasingly evident that Victor Fox was a promotor, not a publisher. Nor an editor.

*****

In November of '39 Fox issued his third magazine, Fantastic Comics; the following January Science Comics appeared; and in March Weird Comics, the last monthly of this first series was distributed. They were all out of the same stewpot -- the meat picked off and the vegetables watered down --- that Wonderworld and Mystery Men had been ladled from.

Fantastic was outstanding in one way, though. It published the most preposterous and grotesque comic hero ever created. His name was Stardust.

The feature character, however, was a reincarnation of Samson. "Out of the mist of history comes the mighty Samson... Like his ancient forebears Samson pits his tremendous strength against the forces of evil and injustice...." Samson was a thick-muscled, old-fashioned, middle European looking fellow with long blond hair, blue thonged sandals, and a pair of woolly trunks that looked more like a mass of pubic hair with delusions of grandeur. In later issues he put a belt on, but it didn't improve the effect much.

The early Samson stories were compounded out of Wonderworld's greatest flaws. Rather than true comic strips, they were a series of tableaux; and where Basil Berold could rise above his weakness here, and make a virtue of it, "Alex Boon" could not. The nameless European backgrounds, the 19th Century kings and rulers and iron men in their stiff collared uniforms, the super-weapons that merely belched larger shells and more poisonous gasses, and had been invented in the last century by Robida or Verne or Wells -- these could have been surmounted and advantageously used, as they were in Wonderworld, if as in Wonderworld, they had been tied to a contemporary symbol such as the Flame. Samson, standing there in his reincarnated carcass, hairy, natural-looking pelt, and shoulder-length hair, was hardly that symbol.

Soon, the artwork was modernized -- if not improved -- and Samson took on a vaguely Anglo-Saxon appearance, the locales were moved nearer home, the villains Americanized, and Samson provided with a boy assistant, David, who, although he scarcely seemed adolescent, was similarly clad (beside Samson, who was always lifting him out of harm's way,

he looked about the size of a wet fox terrier). The improvements wangled him his own bi-monthly magazine -- but they didn't cure the basic weakness, which was Samson himself....

"Professor Fiend," by "Boris Plaster" was a two-pager that was four pages long. It was drawn by "Fred" of "Hemlock Sholmes and Dr. Potson" (who also drew "Billy Bounce, the Kid Detective," occasionally, for Mystery Men, and -- among a legion of others -- "Mike, the Mascot" and "Mortimer, the Monk," for Columbia Comic Corporation's Big Shot Comics). "Fred" was wild, and he wasn't subtle ("Eureka! I've just invented a bladeless knife so people can't cut themselves while slicing bread!"), but for some ungodly reason he was funny. He still is.

It is "Stardust ---the Super Wizard," however, who will ensure immortality for Fantastic Comics. No commentary, no copy, can do him justice. You must sit face to face with the real thing. Anything else is like watching the last days of Pompeii with your eyes closed.

> "While a secret army of spies and murderous terrorists conspires to undermine business, and the government," says the flash panel, "a distant radio call is picked up in America -- a message transmitted from somewhere out in space!"

Then, leering up out of the comic book page, we see these spies and terrorists, beetle-browed, incredibly prognathous, their short, thick muscular necks seeming to reach up for their flat and receding foreheads to haul them even further down. Imagine Basil Wolverton, the creator of Lena the Hyena in "Li'l Abner," doing a dead serious job.* Imagine something worse. Now -- perhaps -- you have the villains of "Stardust" in mind. The story begins:

> "Listen to this, you mugs! Stardust is coming to visit the earth! He's the super crime wiz who is busting spy mobs on a lot of planets! Boy, will he be on our necks!!"

The broadcasting companies fill the air with details that terrify even our big-shot public enemies --

"Stardust, that master mind of the universe, with a mysterious knowledge of criminals, and their plans, will arrive on our planet to-night! He is traveling at amazing speed, on highly accellerated light waves! At 9:45 his powerful light will be visible in the direction of Mars, and at ten o'clock he will land some place in the U.S.A. to begin a merciless clean-up of spies and grade-A racketeers..."

The leaders of the secret army of spies and terrorists call an emergency meeting... "...his scientific use of rays, has made him master of space and planetary forces," their radio proclaims; "the gas of a certain star has made him immune to heat or cold."

"We must destroy him as soon as he arrives!" the terrorist leader shrieks. "Get him in the dark! Use the typhoid germs, and poison gas on him! Use our Hot-X Fusing Liquid on his apparatus! Take him apart with the atom-smasher! Turn the new shredding guns on him! Get him out of the way!"

But then the radio goes on: "...Stardust carries artificial lungs that enable him to breath safely, under any conditions -- he uses new spectral rays, that can make him invisible or as bright as the sun -- he wears a flexible, star-metal skin, controlled through rays from a distant sun and rendering him indestructible by chemicals, or by electrical or violent force!"

Well, that stops the terrorists: "He's so superior we won't be able to touch him! We had better lay off him for a while, and go on with our work. This is the night we're

*Of course Wolverton did serious work. "Spacehawk" in Blue Bolt Comics was a darned good space opera, and ran for quite a while. Later on, Wolverton did at least one cover for Weird Tales of the Future, a very bad cover, and much of the interior art for "WTF" this considerably better than the cover, but not up to "Spacehawk."

RL

scheduled to bump off the president -- we ought to do the job before Stardust gets here let's use our expanding bullets, and send our two best shots!"

The two killers are about to plug the President when there is a sudden blinding flash; as it disappears, Stardust steps forth to say, "You are now in the power of Stardust!"

Take a blond, long-necked, ten foot tall ectomorph -- a thin ten foot tall ectomorph -- and laminate him with great bulging muscles until his head pops up out of them, disproportionately small, like the head of a man wearing six overcoats, clothe him in a purple, square-necked, skin-tight uniform with a wide, red-spotted, yellow belt, and yank out every tooth in his head, replacing them with a set of choppers two sizes too small. You now have a duplicate of Stardust, the Super Wizard.

Next, the terrorists send bombers over Washington with their new Liquid Flame Bombs. Stardust wipes out the planes with their own bombs, and turns his attention to terrorist headquarters.

"Adjust the long-range automatic finder ... get a focus and smash him into a fog!!" screams the leader, directing work on the huge atom-smasher, which looks like a metal-spined red and blue boiler standing on an enormous pogo stick.

But: "When Stardust feels the finder being focused on him, he releases his powerful Boomerang Ray, and the atom-smasher smashes itself ... The spies flee in panic."

Stardust uses his "Magnetic Ray" to draw the spies and terrorists within reach. Then he picks them up and throws them out the window, using his "Suspending Ray" just before they crash on the adjoining roof top. Then, releasing his "Secret Ray," he brings in front of the terrorists the skeletons of the innocent people they have killed. Using another --- unspecified --- ray, he transports an office full of G-men to the roof top to take the spies and terrorists into custody.

Above you, are the leaders of the spy army, with my compliments! In five minutes they will drop! Good luck!" says Stardust, flashing away into space.

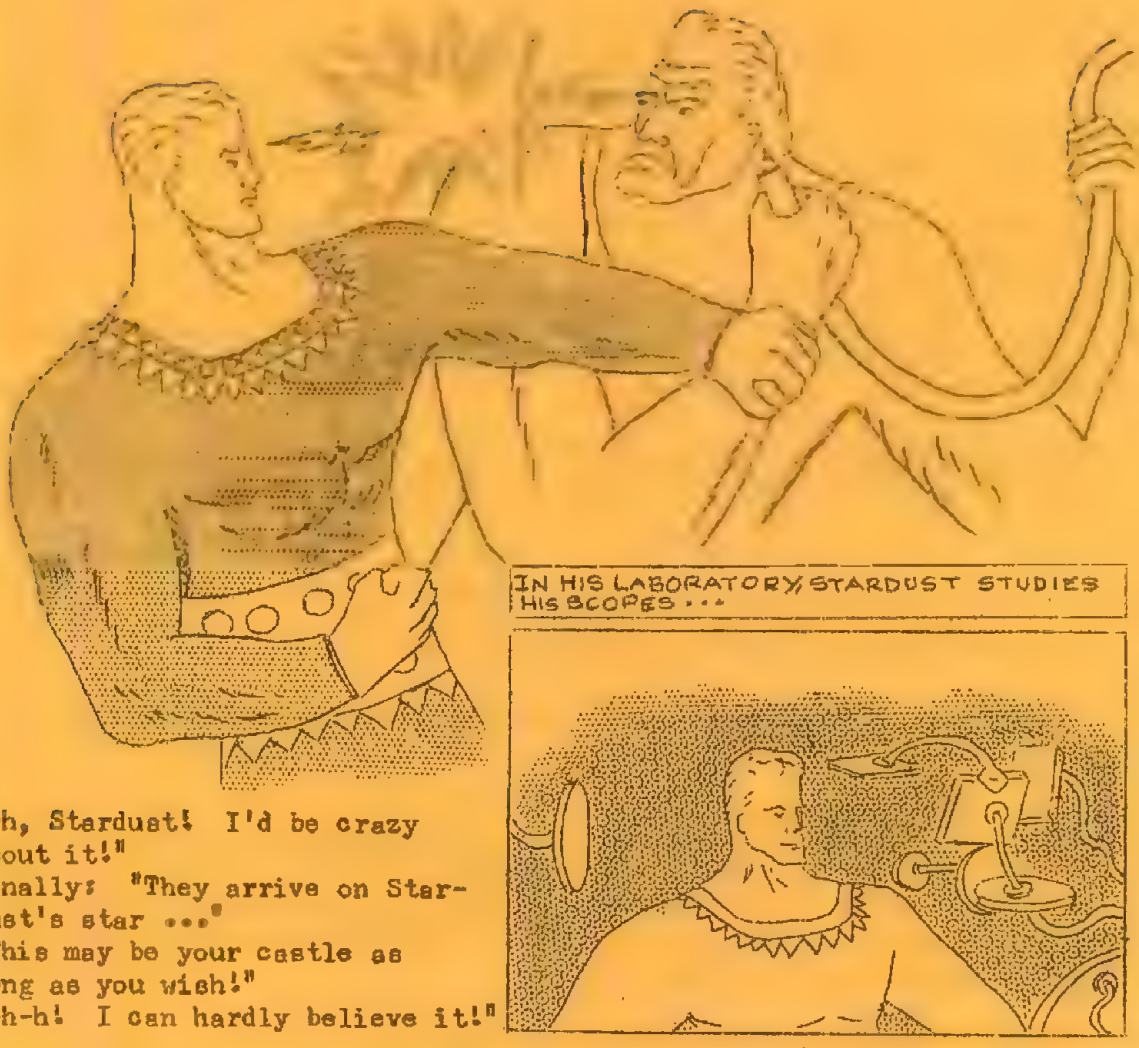
The G-men's eyes follow his vapor-trail until it vanishes. And then one says: "That's Stardust! And we didn't have a chance to thank him!"

And: "In the next exciting issue of Fantastic Comics, Stardust battles "Rip-the-Blood!"

Whoooh!

A year later, Stardust found love. Rushing to Earth to save the planet from enormous vultures a mad Venusian scientist named Kaos had unleashed --- he got here, by the way, in his tubular spatial, travelling at terrific speed on accellerated supersolar light waves --- Stardust arrives in time to rescue a girl the fiend had ordered up for himself. Evidently feeling that it is no time to take chances with rays, Stardust rams the vulture carrying her head on, without even mussing a hair. The dead beast drops the girl and "the girl begins falling." At the last moment, Stardust swoops down and saves her. Then:

"Are you hurt?"
"I think not! But I'm terribly upset and scared.
"Shall I take you back to your home?"
"Oh, please, don't take me back! Those birds have wrecked our home and killed my parents!"
"You must feel terrible! But isn't there some place you'd like to go?"
"I'm all alone in the world, but you're so kind I'd like to be with you until I get over my fright!"
"But I have duties to attend to!"
"Oh, please take me with you! I'll try not to be of any bother!"
"Would you like to come to my private star for a while? It's very restful there!"



"Oh, Stardust! I'd be crazy about it!"
Finally: "They arrive on Stardust's star ..."
"This may be your castle as long as you wish!"
"Oh-h! I can hardly believe it!"

I can hardly believe it myself. If we can have primitive art, why can't we have primative trash? If Grandma Moses and Mickey Walker can become famous, why shouldn't "Fletcher Hanks"?

(I can see Hanks now, standing proudly before his one-man show. He'd be blond, of course; balding probably -- ectomorphs have fine hair and usually begin losing it fairly early; thin -- there might be the suggestion of a pot belly, though, after these twenty years; tall, surely. And long necked. Those early maturing, hard muscled, strong jawed, mesomorphs who made his teens miserable trouble him some yet; and even now Hanks may have difficulty talking to the prettier feminine patrons. And the dark ... well ... the dark still bothers him a little, and he always reaches around the corner to turn on the switch in the gallery washroom before he actually goes in.)

Edmund Pearson once published Queer Books, a marvelous sampler from eccentric novels and speeches and stories. Today, he would have included "Stardust."

Science Comics and Weird Comics didn't even have a "Samson" or a "Stardust" to leave to posterity.
The titles of some of Science's strips tell the story: "The Eagle" (this was a few months after "Hawkman" appeared in Flash Comics), "Electro" ("Jim Andrews, electrical scientist, is working with a pair of giant electrodes ... 'Good heavens! There's going to be an accident here!'"), "Cosmic Carson" (by "Buck Rogers" curent artist, George Tuska, and fully as good), "Marga, the Panther Woman" (Van Dorf, a mad physio-biologist, escaped into the heart of the African jungle from an asylum. He had been confined there for attempting to produce a race of people with the blood of panthers fused into them. As hostage, he brought a beautiful, white, blonde nurse with him ...")

Weird featured "Thor, God of Thunder," a reincarnation of Thor, god of thunder; then, when this reincarnation didn't go over, "The Dart", a reincarnation of "the ancient Roman racket buster, Caius Martius." Reincarnation-wise, Victor Fox was scraping the bottom of the barrel. In private life, the Dart was Caius Martius Wheeler, a timid high school teacher of Roman history; Thor was a guy whose girl kicked sand in his face. "Thor" mutated into Peter Thor, an explosives expert who was able to fly around in a red and blue costume as "Dynamite Thor" by periodically exploding little charges of "Dynamite pills." Weird also carried another of Fox Publications' alliterative "science fiction" strips, "Blast Bennett" (altogether, there were "Blast Bennett," "Cosmic Carson," "Perisphere Payne," "Space Smith," "Flip Falcon," and "Sub Saunders"). There was "Birdman," too, but he was no "Hawkman" copy: the feathers grew right out of his hide. Unless he knew a chicken plucker, it's unlikely he had an alternate identity.

As if to make up for all this, Basil Berold worked overtime on the early covers. They are some of the most well-drawn, damnedest comic covers ever printed. One -- in the second issue of Weird -- has remained in my memory for twenty-one years.

In the center of the page -- her flesh translucent below the neck, displaying her skeletal structure and the outline of her body -- stands a beautiful blonde girl, eyes staring blankly ahead as though she is hypnotized. Before the girl, connected to a cabinet studded with dials and buttons and knobs, is a huge white crystal ball blazing with an orange corona. Its rays, apparently fluoroscoping the girl's body, illuminate a garish laboratory crammed with bizarre vacuum tubes and insulators; they illuminate, too, the rectangular panel in the wall behind her, and the immense, swarthy man -- his Eastern face hideously contorted -- clad in a dark turban and robe with a figured red sash, who looms menacingly, massive arms reaching out as though he is about to mug or strangle her.

Blue robes billowing in the right foreground, a totally bald, vaguely Mayan-looking man crouches over the controls of the crystal ball. On his head is a peculiar apparatus resembling a switchboard operator's headphones, but from its top two calibrated structures are thrust and miniature arcs of lightning play between them.

On the left is an open Egyptian mummy case. In that case, fully wrapped, except for his face and the right hand is a husky man with distinctively English features. The free right hand holds a .45 calibre automatic pistol, and a shaft of fire leaps from its muzzle to the chest of the Mayan, whose gnarled hands are twisted in agony.

The caption reads: "The mummy stirred...a gun flashed and blasted the fiend into eternity.

The astonishing thing about all this is that it damned near looks real. The crazy picture looks almost convincing. The cover illustrates nothing inside, and for twenty-one years I've been trying -- from time to time -- to concoct a reasonable explanation for the scene.

I haven't had any luck.

III

A time of consolidation and expansion followed. New titles were issues, but all were based on established Fox Publications characters. Although Science Comics and Rex Dexter went under, Samson and Big [illegible] (Fox was always a promoter: the comic featured "Blue Beetle," "Samson," and "The Flame") took their place. With these two, the four surviving parent magazines, and Blue Beetle, The Flame, and Green Mask, Fox had a stable of nine comic books by the end of 1940 -- not bad for a man who'd published his first one a year and a half before.

Now, with comics taking up less of the publisher's time, Fox magazines began to advertise something new. It was called "Kooba Cola." It was "America's Greatest Nickel Value," "A New Thrill!" "The Long Tall Drink That's Tangy and Cooling as an Ocean Breeze." And the good-looking blonde said, "I'll take Kooba with the new tang and extra zest -- America's favorite cola drink with Vitamin B_1."

I've never met anyone who even heard of Kooba Cola, let alone actually drank the stuff. It must have been sold somewhere, though, for soon contests were started and a premium campaign began. (You could get a raincape for 195 Kooba bottle caps, although by that time you'd probably be so waterlogged you'd hardly need it; and a basketball for 745 caps -- after all, your grandchildren could play with it.)

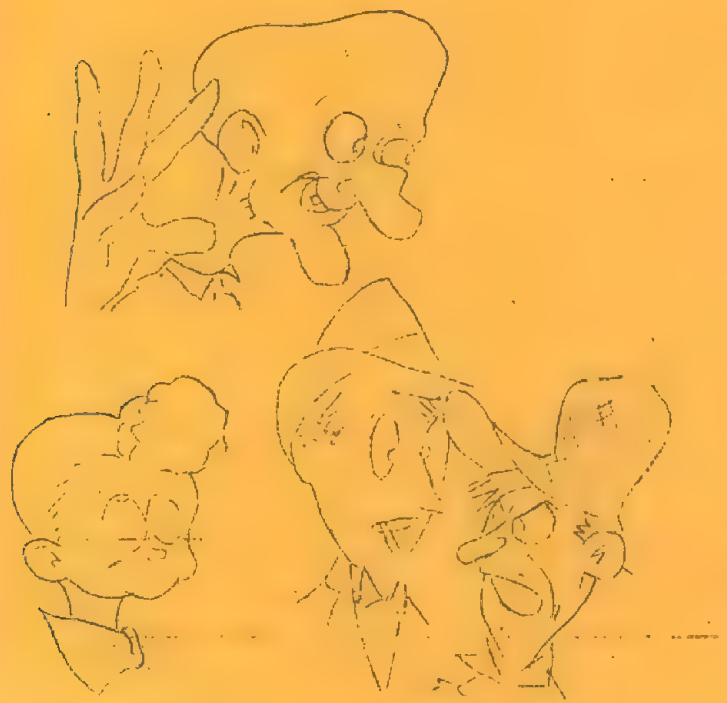
In July of '41, while all this was at its peak, Swank Magazine (no relation to the current publication), "For the Man Who Knows," ogled the newsstand customers for the first time. It was a tall, saddle-stitched, Esquire-sized magazine, listing V.S. Fox as publisher, and packed with Esquire-style girlie cartoons (Michael Berry, Bill Wenzel), pin-ups (you'd never recognize Dinah Shore), articles (a chapter from Irving Wallace's recent The Square Pegs -- that one about George Francis Train, who ran for dictator of the United States and posed for Phileas Fogg of Around the World in Eighty Days -- appeared in the January '42 issue), fiction (Jerome Weidman, Chester B. Himes), and departments (Hy Gardner, Leo Guild, Caswell Adams -- and the anonymously conducted "From the Bachelor's Bar," which revealed, among the White Horse Whips and the Whiskey Collinses, the ingredients of a "Kooba Cooler": "Fill a tall glass with ice cubes. Add juice of lime or lemon. Pour in one small whiskey glassful of Bacardi Rum and fill with sparkling Kooba Cola.") It claimed a reader audience of 1,300,000.

To the public, things must have looked good for Victor Fox.

IV

In the space of months Kooba Cola vanished, Swank collapsed, Blue Beetle left the air, and Fox's comic book chain fell to pieces.

Swank's actual circulation was nearer 100,000 than 1,300,000. Fox was figuring ten to thirteen readers per copy. All promoters are optimists.



Swank had its virtues, quite a few of them. But it had its faults. It was too cheap for the Esquire readers, and too high-class for the people who say "high-class." Fox tried to pump up circulation with cartoons that were a little startling for a mass circulation magazine twenty years ago: In September, a dishevelled brunette smirks at the reader, "It always makes me feel better." And a near nude blonde leers from the January issue, "...then I said, I'm going as 'New Year's Eve'... eating my apple won't stop me." Unlike Playboy's nudes, the cartoons didn't help Swank on the newsstands, and the only advertisers they attracted were peddlers of men's girdles, and elevator shoes. By March '42, even the Kooba Cola ad had vanished. But then, by March '42 Kooba Cola itself had vanished.

Soon, Swank followed it into oblivion; unlike Playboy's format, nobody ever successfully copies anything of Esquire's.

Maybe Kooba Cola had its good points, too. Perhaps a publisher with a healthier string of comics could actually have established a new soft drink through his magazines alone. But Fox's magazines were sick, now. They could not even sell themselves, nor could the "Blue Beetle" radio program, for it, too, was gone. Berold had left "The Flame" and soo Wonderworld and The Flame died. Daylight was showing through the cracks in Fox Publicatic false front. The other magazines, badly dated now, went one by one, leaving only Green and Blue Beetle.

By 1946 Fox had a whole new line of nine comic books, with Green Mask and Blue Beetle for the anchor men, but even though the new corporation name, Fox Feature Syndicate, sounded important, the new title were weak: Cosmo Cat, Zoot, Motalife, Jo-Jo the Congo King, Rib Tickler, Rocket Kelly, and All Top. None of them were monthly and titles changed frequently. Fox tried new promotions and new premium campaigns. Nothing would have helped but better art and better stories. Green Mask folded. In desperation he turned to crime comic books: Murder Incorporated, Famous Crimes, and Crimes by Women. Even Blue Beetle was dominated by "true" crime yarns and the title character almost vanished from the covers. By 1948, the Fox magazines, despite excursions such as Meet Corliss Archer, a teenage comic, were leaning heavily on jungle queens and scantily clad costume heroines like Phantom Lady to do what only better stories and illustrations could do -- and Corliss wasn't above showing a little thigh, herself.

Of all his original titles, only Blue Beetle was left. The character of the strip had been changed so many times it had virtually no buyer image at all. Fox was in deep troubl

In the beginning, Blue Beetle was probably an accident. Something to bolster up the Mystery Men title. The third issue, for example, leads off with a nine page Green Mask yarn; Blue Beetle is buried in a four-pager toward the back of the book -- he doesn't even have the finishing spot. But there were no human relationships to bring life to "Green Mask" as they had to the comic book leaders, "Superman," "Batman," and "Captain Marvel," and the others.

Sure Green Mask and "News" Doaks worked together, but the reporter was only a handy news source; Green Mask did without him easily enough -- and Green Mask's private life was so utterly anonymous you began wo wonder what he was covering up. Without the mask, maybe he was Rin-tin-tin.

Blue Beetle, however, needed his friends: Dr. Franz, who had devised his mailed costume, and helped him with disguises and scientific identification work; Mike Mannigan, his heavy-set, semi-comic -- and unsuspecting -- pardner in his real identity as Dan Garrett, a rooky policeman; and, after the strip developed, Joan Mason, reporter and Garrett's girl friend. (Garrett dumped an equivalent of Green Mask's "News" Doaks; a dishevelled newshawk named Charley Storm.)

Cliches they were, but they allowed plot development and reader identification and brought at least a semblance of "real life" to Fox's magazines, where most of the heroes didn't seem to have a close friend in the world. It's no wonder Blue Beetle soon became Mystery Men's most popular character.

He wore Blue tights of a special lightweight mail, a close-fitting, thigh-length blue doublet and hood of the same material, a leather belt with a blue beetle symbol set into the center of the yellow buckle (which contained a secret compartment for skeleton keys and such), and a black domino mask. In costume, Garrett looked much like a medieval knight stripped of his trappings, standing in his naked body armor.

Garrett's pardner on the police force, Mike Mannigan, was convinced -- no matter what heroics Blue Beetle performed -- that he was a criminal, and although he frequently helped Blue Beetle capture crooks, when the work was done Mannigan tried to capture him, too. They hit eachother over the head so many times their skulls should have looked like scale models of the Andes.

It was probably this gimmick that interested the radio producers. It gave the show the predictable, mechanical format they needed for broadcasting: Dan Garrett and Mannigan on patrol duty, a crime is committed, Garrett evades his pardner and becomes Blue Beetle, solves the crime with the help of Dr. Franz or Joan Mason and the hindrance of Mannigan, and finally escapes Mannigan's clutches to become Rookie Patrolman Dan Garrett -- who missed the whole thing -- once again. It should have interested them, anyhow, because this was substantially "The Green Hornet's" format -- and it was doing very well just then.

By September of 1940, "Blue Beetle" was on fourty-four stations from coast to coast, twice a week, including WMCA, New York, and KSAN, San Francisco. And like "The Green Hornet," each episode was complete in itself, something of a novelty then when serials were still going strong.

Then, like the rest of Fox's paper empire, the "Blue Beetle" radio show went under.

Trying to find the right formula, Fox tinkered with the strip continually. The writing was never good -- it never realized the inherent possibilities of the characters -- but the anonymous artwork, crude in the beginning, improved under an artist of some skill and style -- and then declined again at the hands of the like of Larry Antoinette (who also drew "Sub-Zero Man" for Blue Bolt Comics) and others. For a time, possibly inspired by Tick-Tock Tyler, "The Hour Man," Dr. Franz came up with "Vitamin 2-X" for Garrett, a concoction that gave him temporary "super-energy."

By the winter of 1945, however, Blue Beetle was quarterly, drawn with astonishing ineptitude by a cartoonist named Stoner (the "official" name of the artist was "Otis," and it endured through several cartoonists, just as had the original "Charles Nicholas," and, a little later, "Walter Swift"). Fox had come up with a new circulation gimmick: readers sent in their photographs, and each issue a boy and girl were selected to accompany Blue Beetle on his adventure. The strip had given up resemblance to the original; Blue Beetle now had super-powers, including flight, and only Joan Mason remained of the original format -- she was the kids' chaperone.

The gimmick, as usual, didn't pay off. But Fox had a new one by late '46: "Green Premium Coupons." They were printed in every issue of Fox comics, and they were really a bargain, a lot better than S & H Green Stamps. If you saved every coupon from every Fox magazine published, you could have gotten -- free -- a pair of boxing gloves after only seventeen years, or a magic set or wallet after twelve and a half. The only disquieting note was that Fox Feature Syndicate reserved the right to withdraw without notice any or all of the premiums at any time.

By now, Blue Beetle had lost most of his super-powers and was making his living again as a rookie patrolman. Stoner was still at work, and the drawings were worse than ever. But Blue Beetle was bi-monthly once more; maybe the premiums gimmick worked for a while.

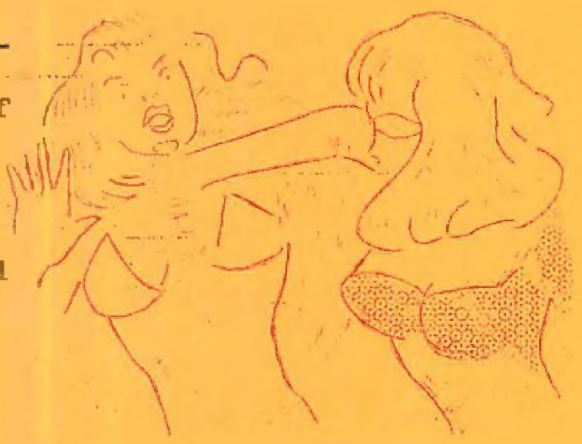
Less than two years later, those kids saving up for boxing gloves discovered they should have sold short. Fox was pushing crime comics now, and Blue Beetle had moved up to a monthly. A new "Blue Beetle" artist -- a considerable improvement on Stoner -- was at work and the strip had returned to something resembling its original format.

Then the bottom dropped out. Sales fell off and Blue Beetle went bi-monthly again.

Fox, who had sexed up stories a la Fiction House to raise circulation, now went a step further in an effort to stay in business. And with the instinct of a man in the wrong business, he did the thing that has destroyed marginal publishers again and again and again. What Victor S. Fox did led directly to the establishment of the Comics Code Authority. His magazines were not the only ones, nor was he principally responsible, but without Fox and the publishers like him, the Code would never have come into being. Censorship of adult literature is an evil thing. Censorship of a child's literature, by someone other than the parents, is not a good thing -- but it is a better thing than the license that permitted Victor Fox to publish as he did.

The Fox Feature Syndicate and Blue Beetle turned toward the sado-masochists, the fetishists, and the other hangers-one in the borderlands of sexual neuroticism.

The May 1948 issue began with a story about a beautiful, long-haired, blonde who had devised "the biggest plan in the world" for making money. Clad in a filmy leotard, cut to the thigh on either side, and a halter with shoulder-length, fingerless gloves -- typical fetishist costume -- she begins a campaign of murder. On page two, she drives a knife into the throat of "the debutante of the year," just after the girl has undressed for bed, and drops her calling card, a miniature sphinx, in the blood that runs out upon her breast. On page three, she plants another knife between the breasts of a strip-teaser dressed in bra and panties. The girl she murders on page eight shows only a bit of thigh as she takes a knife in her throat. Why did the killer do it? "They think I'm mad, eh? Just wait'll I've killed a half a dozen prominent women...as the Sphinx! Then I start snatching them and their friends will fall over themselves to pay ransom! They'll know I mean business!"



In the next, July 1948, issue:

"Seamen perished in plastic webs! Such was the nightmare woven with the skill of the spider by a sombre team who hoodwinked justice until BLUE BEETLE himself decided to become entangled in the case which was plotted by a twisted brain, then fulfilled by a mistress of murder, "THE BLACK WIDOW!"

That first line would fascinate a psychiatrist

The Black Widow's dress, supported by two narrow straps, plunges to the waist in the front and back, and at the sides it is slashed from waist to hem, revealing her thighs and hips. The bra cups, with her nipples as the center, are two spider webs. She wears French heels. Virtual duplicates of this costume may be found in the most extreme fetishist drawings and photographs.

The Black Widow carries a device that ejects filaments of plastic similar to spider webs. She sprays the faces of her victims with this goo, and as they strangle to death before her, she leaves her sign, a dead black widow spider upon their bodies. Why? "...I have quite a

score to settle with the Navy! One stupid seaman left me at the church... And forty years ago my father was disgraced with a dishonorable discharge! No... We hold no love for the Navy... Neither of us!" Ultimately, she and her father, the mastermind, capture Mike Mannigan and Joan Mason, and take them to the cellar of their home, where, against one wall, an enormous plastic spider web is woven. In the concluding scene, the Black Widow deliberately kills her father with the plastic spraygun as he dangles from the center of the web, obstructing her clear shot of Blue Beetle.

You do not have to be a Frederick Wertham to read the meanings of these stories and their words. Nor even know much about sex symbolism.

These stories were sold to boys and girls. They were sold to children without sexual experience, searching for the meanings and relationships of sexual experience. The Black Widow and the Sphinx must have helped them in their search.

*****

I don't know how much longer Blue Beetle was published. Fox Feature Syndicate went on. Later that year, the third issue of Crimes by Women appeared. The cover displays four attractive women, guns in their fists, their clothes in tatters, attempting a jail break. They are trapped on the top of the prison wall, and the guards are machine-gunning them. "You asked for it...sister!" a guard yells as he shoots a blonde down. The brunette, her eyes bulging, cries "Aaagh! My leg!" The redhead fires back at the guard tower. "Here's one for luck!" she screams. And the other blonde, the best looking one, kneels in the foreground, a blazing sub-machinegun cradled in her arms. "Try this in ya belly ya louse!" she says.

Eight years before, the Flame's foster father had sent him out into the world from the pages of another Fox magazine. He had said, "My son, you leave us armed with potent mystic powers -- use them for good!"

Victor Fox had come a long way.

V

Blue Beetle made his final appearance in the mid-'50s.* The Fox Feature Syndicate was dead at last, and Blue Beetle was headlined in a special issue of Space Adventures, a Charlton Publication. His performance in costume was only a token one, irrelevant to the story, and Dan Garrett -- still a rookie cop -- solved the crime in his other blue uniform, the one with the badge on it.

It was a sign of the times that he spent almost a page trying to figure out a way to get rid of Mike Mannigan and into costume. In the old days he'd have told Mannigan there was a lead he wanted to follow up; by '54, he wrecked the patrol car -- "realism" was in.

The decline of the idealistic super-hero, and the ascendance of the all too mortal hero-victim and hero-villain -- culminating in the Feldstein EC comics -- was inevitable. When America entered World War II, our eyes had been turned inward for a decade; Steinbeck, Saroyan, and Caldwell, each an idealist, were our leading writers. We carried that home-grown idealism into the war, and, at war's end, we discovered it had not been enough. We discovered, too, that some of it had been false. Saroyan, who depended so much on his personal vision, cracked wide open in The Adventures of Wesley Jackson; Caldwell became an aimless hack; Steinbeck a more conscientious one. As a nation we turned first to disillusionment, then to self-examination and self-criticism, then to self-revilement and despair and apathy. Our literature followed us. And our popular literature, of course, did too.

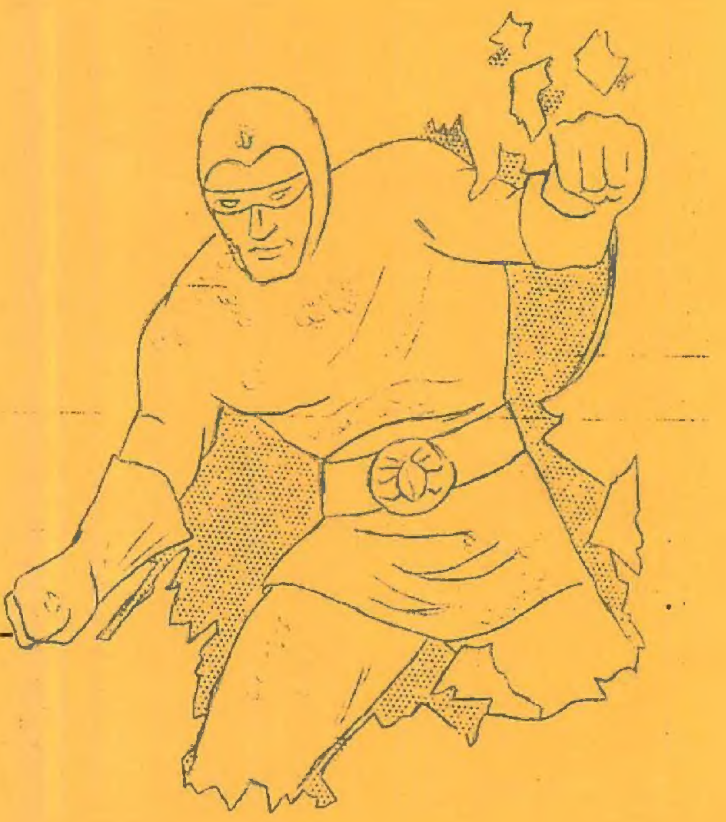
In science fiction, Galaxy appeared on the scene as the last wave of disillusionment sobbed, and rode the tide of caustic self-criticism to success with Ray Bradbury's

*Well, not quite. There was yet another appearance of the Blue Beetle in an "IW" reprint comic in 1961. The comic was called, for some reason, The Human Fly, and lasted only one issue. As with all IW comics to date, distribution was spotty at best. The material, also as in all IW comics, was reprinted without copyright credit.

"The Fireman," published in book form as Fahrenheit 451, and Kornbluth and Phl's "Gravy Planet", which Ballantine Books issues as The Space Merchants. And then Galaxy -- and much of the rest of science fiction -- went out with the tide and came back in with self-revilement and despair.

It has been suggested that, beyond her nature as a person and as a sexual symbol, woman symbolizes the world to man. Perhaps this is so. If it is, it may explain the hatred of woman in our post-War, Cold War, literature (and life), for we have surely hated the world we live in. Perhaps it explains the success of Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, and Ian Fleming's James Bond stories, and the countless other, similar, stories of "detection." In any case, the post-war detective story has mirrored our disillusionment, too.

War or no war, however, the decline of the super-hero was inevitable. The rhythm of idealism, disillusionment, self-criticism, self-revilement, despair -- and then, when the emotions have exhausted themselves, the founding of a new optimistic realism on the sound principles of the old idealism, followed by the creation of a new idealism, is an inevitable one itself. Already, in the comic world we are seeing, perhaps, in the revival in somewhat altered forms of the costume heroes of the past, the first signs that the cycle is making a full turn.



Maybe even Blue Beetle will come back once more....

The decline of Victor Fox and his magazines was inevitable too. He began with a remarkable artist, Basil Berold, and a seller's market for the comic book costume hero. But popular fiction and trash mirror their times, they do not -- like art -- create them, and Fox, by 1941, was a man out of his times. Whatever his age, he was born twenty-five years too late.

Even so, he might have survived as others have. But Fox was always a promoter, never a publisher or editor. Like all promoters, he could never understand that you can't sell people entertainment -- not with prize contests and premiums -- they have to buy it. Nor could he understand what every good editor and publisher knows, and what the bad ones seem never to believe -- despite the bleached bones of too many magazines to count -- that you can always sell sex, but you can never sell depravity, not in the long haul, not in the competitive market. The public only pays for what it wants. And most people have a mean streak of decency in them.

This was Victor S. Fox's education. He began his career in his best blue suit, standing in line for a high school diploma. He ended it, blue jeans gaping at the knees, being drummed out of kindergarten.

—Richard Kyle

- - - -

ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME

THE SERIES SO FAR...

In response to popular demand (East Coast Al Lewis agreed to demand it in exchange for being permitted to tape our record collection) here is a summary of the "All in Color for a Dime" series to date. The column marked art# refers to the article in the series. The column marked is# refers to the issue of Xero in which the article appeared. Author is obvious, but artist, note, refers only to the swiper/stenciller. The original artists involved are generally mentioned in the articles themselves. Title and topic is also obvious, with the latter in parenthises on the lower line.

art#	is#	author	artist	title and topic
1	1	Dick Lupoff	Tom Hief	The Big Red Cheese (Captain Marvel, other members of the Marvel Family)
1.1	3	Dick Lupoff	Sylvia White	Shaz-Urk! (additions and corrections to 1)
1.2	5	Otto Binder	" "	At Home with the Marvels (additions and corrections to 1)
2	2	Ted White	" "	The Spawn of M. C. Gaines (beginnings and development of the DC comics chain)
2.1	3	Ted White	" "	Son of the Spawn of M. C. Gaines (additions and corrections to 2)
3	3	Jim Harmon	" "	A Bunch of Swell Guys (All-Star Comics and the Justice Society of America)
4	4	Don Thompson	Maggie Curtis	Okay, Axis, Here We Come! (Timely group /Capt America, Human Torch, Namor/)
5	6	Dick Lupoff	Sylvia White	The Several Soldiers of Victory (Leading Comics and the Seven Soldiers of Victory)
6	6	Dick Ellington	" "	Me to your Leader Take (Planet Comics and the Fiction House group)
7	7	Don Thompson	Maggie Curtis	The Wild Ones (The Spectre and Dr. Fate)
8	8	Richard Kyle	Jim Moriarty	The Education of Victor Fox (Fox group /Flame, Green Mask, Blue Beetle, etc./)

Additional AICFAD articles will appear in the final two issues of Xero, later this year, after which the series will be transferred to Don Thompson's fanzine Comic Art.

Before you waste any effort writing for back issues, there are none available. Sorry. If you live within visiting distance of New York, you are welcome to look over the file set of Xero: otherwise, you're strictly on your own for the time being. Some time in 1963 the entire series (or at least that portion appearing Xero) may be collected, republished, and offered for sale. Plans are still nebulous, however, no orders are being accepted as yet; details will be announced if/when plans become more solid.